

City working hard to reduce school bus emissions

Randall Beach , Register Staff
The New Haven Register

09/15/2004

NEW HAVEN — Brianna Purdie, 8, who has had asthma since birth, was on hand Tuesday to welcome a new program that will reduce diesel emissions from the city's school buses.

Her mother, Joy Purdie, who also attended the ceremony at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School, added this to her endorsement: It's about time.

"Connecticut is a rich state," she said. "This should've been done a long time ago."

However, environmental officials at the announcement said the technology was not available until recently.

They noted diesel particulate matter is a probable human carcinogen and that diesel exhaust exacerbates asthma as well as other chronic respiratory diseases. Children are especially susceptible.

"School buses are supposed to be safe places for our kids," said Mayor John DeStefano Jr. "Instead, we expose kids — many of them with asthma — to dirty air. These converters will take it out of the air our kids breathe."

During the current academic year, all 182 of the city's public school buses will be retrofitted with emission control technologies, according to the officials.

These technologies will include a diesel oxidation catalyst and closed crankcase ventilation system, along with a clean fuel additive. This will be used with ultra low sulfur diesel fuel that is already in place.

Asthma rates in New England are among the highest in the nation. Yuland Daley, asthma coordinator for the city's Health Department, said 18 percent of New Haven public school students have asthma, twice the statewide level.

She said blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately affected.

Brianna Purdie said some days her asthma forces her to stay home from school. "They should stop with the smoke," she said, nodding toward to a nearby school bus.

School bus drivers in the city will also be reminded to comply with the state's anti-idling law, which specifies school buses cannot run while idle for more than three minutes.

Arthur Rocque Jr., commissioner for the state Department of Environmental Protection, displayed anti-idling signs, which will be voluntarily posted by New Haven school officials.

Rocque said such idling contributes to air pollution and wastes fuel.

The officials said the new measures and technologies will reduce total particulate emissions by at least 40 percent.

Randall Beach can be reached at rbeach@nhregister.com or 789-5766.